

A Proposal for Education Reform in  
Japanese Elementary Schools  
~ A 2011 Fulbright Visiting Scholar Report (1) ~

Toshikazu KIKUCHI

*I do hope that I will become a bridge across the Pacific.*

Dr. Inazo Nitobe (1862-1933)

**Introduction**

Coincidentally exactly 100 years after Dr. Inazo Nitobe, widely renowned as the author of *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*, delivered a lecture about world peace at Columbia University on November 20, 1911, a Japanese man was standing out on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City on a chilly evening. He was looking up at *Believe*, a huge fiber optic display which was hanging on Macy's Herald Square brilliantly illuminated as a holiday decoration in the winter months. Macy's is where the movie *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street* was filmed in 1947.

On the street packed with people with gifts in their hands, the Japanese man, who had experienced such a massive and unprecedented earthquake in 2011, and who had lost his father in a gigantic tsunami that rolled over his hometown, was concerned about hundreds of children who lost their parents and loved ones in the earthquake and tsunami. The man had a dream of establishing an elementary school for these children.

Within twenty minutes before the devastating tsunami arrived, the children of Unosumai Elementary School and Kamaishi Higashi Junior High School in Kamaishi City successfully escaped by themselves hand-in-hand from the tsunami by changing their location and evacuating three times to safer places, and eventually everybody was safe. Later, this was called “Miracle in Kamaishi.”

The earthquake and tsunami destroyed 90% of his hometown, totally causing about 20,000 deaths in the Tohoku area. By creating new classrooms and a school that would heal the mind and spirit of every child, the man wanted the children to believe that tomorrow could be a better day. He wished one more miracle could happen to the children in his hometown.

Dr. Nitobe was the first exchange professor between Japan and the U.S. and a founding director of UNESCO. As a person from the same prefecture as Dr. Nitobe, the Japanese man on the street admired Dr. Nitobe as one of the few Japanese people who contributed a great deal to Japan’s internationalization through education and diplomatic efforts. The man hoped that he would become a bridge across the Pacific, too.

That Japanese man, the author of this article, was studying at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar. While pursuing my research goal at Teachers College, I had several opportunities to visit elementary schools in Manhattan and had an eye opening experience which made me come to the conclusion that there was an urgent need in Japan to create a better teacher training program for Japanese elementary school teachers. I left the U.S. thinking that if the Japanese government truly wanted to accelerate Japan’s global competitiveness among Asian countries, and if the Japanese government wanted to find any solution in education reform in terms of the nurturing of global human resources, it was not at the university level but rather at the elementary

school level that education needed urgent fundamental reform.

This is the first of two installments reporting on my continuing research and teaching resulting from my activities as a Fulbrighter. In this article, a particular stress will be placed on education reform in Japanese elementary schools, while referring to the Fulbright Program and my activities in the U.S. as a Fulbrighter. In the second installment, due to be published in August 2013, the main statement of my Fulbright project, *A Curriculum Development Study for Japanese Hearing Students Learning English with the Implementation of American Sign Language*, will be the focus.

## **1. The Fulbright Program**

First of all, as a returning Fulbrighter, let me draw your attention to the Fulbright Program, which brought me productive and meaningful experiences in the U.S. both professionally and personally, to share the kinds of opportunities the program offers with others who may not be familiar with it.

### **1.1 Program History**

The Fulbright Program, established in 1946 under legislation introduced by then Senator J. William Fulbright (1905-1995) of Arkansas, is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. Currently the Fulbright Program operates in over 155 countries worldwide and has played an important role in fostering the development of leaders in various fields.

The following statement was the message from the late Senator Fulbright that strongly motivated me to apply for the Fulbright Program hoping to be a global leader for change:

*Educational exchange can turn nations into people, contributing as no other*

*form of communication can to the humanizing of international relations. ...I do not think educational exchange is certain to produce affection between peoples, nor indeed do I think that is one of its necessary purposes; it is quite enough if it contributes to the feeling of a common humanity, to an emotional awareness that other countries are populated not by doctrines that we fear but by people with the same capacity for pleasure and pain, for cruelty and kindness, as the people we were brought up with in our own countries.*

## **1.2 Program Administration**

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the U.S. Department of State administers the Fulbright Program under policy guidelines established by the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (FSB). The FSB, composed of 12 educational and public leaders appointed by the President of the United States, has final responsibilities for approving selection of all grantees, and supervises the conduct of the program both in the United States and abroad.

For students, the Institute of International Education (IIE), headquartered in New York City, serves as the Cooperating Agency while the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) serves this role for foreign lecturers and researchers. CIES confirms or arranges the placement of candidates, reviews their academic plans, and counsels them on their programs and their practical needs and problems.

In cooperation with CIES, *One To World*, founded in 1977 as a non-profit organization for Fulbright scholar enrichment programs, functions as a local resource center in the New York area. *One To World* sponsors a variety of programs through bus and walking tours, concert and theater parties, receptions, and other social activities. *One To World* also gives international scholars and students an opportunity, called Global Classroom,

to make interactive presentations in New York City public schools about their countries and cultures as well as their academic disciplines. In this regard, Fulbrighters are “cultural ambassadors” to their host countries.

*One To World* is continuing a very special program this year focused on expanding knowledge of Japanese culture. Through the generous support of the Japan Foundation, Global Classroom’s “Passport to Japan” program inspires K-12 students’ interests in Japanese culture and understanding of perspectives. In 2011, “Passport to Japan” reached over 100 NYC public school students, who explored Japanese art, history, food, geography, music and more. These workshops not only engaged the students’ learning, but also deepened their appreciation for Japanese culture.

### **1.3 The Japan-United States Educational Commission**

The Japan-U.S. Educational Commission, headquartered in Tokyo, supervised by the Executive Director Dr. David H. Satterwhite, gives priority to the social sciences and humanities. Regarding studies in the field of education, the Commission is interested in studies related to educational systems of Japan and the U.S. with particular focus on contemporary issues. Areas of study may include all aspects of internationalization (institutional, faculty, students), structural and curricular reform, and the role of education in society.

According to the Commission<sup>\*1</sup>, the Japan Fulbright Program, established in 1951, has awarded more than 6,200 grants to Japanese and approximately 2,450 grants to Americans over the 60 years of its existence. Prior to the Fulbright Program, approximately 1,000 Japanese studied in the U.S. under the Government Aid and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA) Program from 1949 to 1951.

Among Fulbrighters, including current and former positions, there are

6 Nobel Laureates, 3 Pulitzer Prize Winners, 57 ambassadors, 6 cabinet members, 17 members of parliament, 12 supreme court justices, 120 lawyers, 450 corporate officers and CEOs, 220 journalists, 740 medical doctors and nurses, 170 university or college presidents, and 4,400 professors.

The Japan Fulbright Program is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2012. In commemoration of this landmark occasion, an anniversary symposium was held in Tokyo on May 26<sup>th</sup>, titled “Paving the Path – Envisioning the Future.” Dr. Eichi Negishi, a 1960 Fulbright Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania and 2010 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, was the keynote speaker of the symposium.

## **2. My Fulbright Experiences in the U.S.**

Upon returning home, Fulbrighters are encouraged to speak and write about their Fulbright experience as widely as possible. As I understand that I am an important resource for other academics and professionals as well as my colleagues who may be interested in my experiences researching abroad, let me share the benefits and challenges of my Fulbright experiences in this chapter. Due to the limitation of space, reference is not made here to 8 receptions and 14 tours I participated in.

### **2.1 Host Institution: Teachers College**

In response to my request, Dr. Stephen T. Peverly, a professor of Psychology and Education and the Chair of the Department of Health and Behavior Studies at Teachers College, Columbia University, invited me to be a Fulbright Visiting Scholar during the 2011 – 12 Academic Year (September 1, 2011 to May 31, 2012) with the approval of the Committee of the Teachers College Visiting Scholars Program. Dr. Russell S. Rosen, coordinator of the program in the Teaching of American Sign Language as a

Foreign Language, warmly welcomed me as a co-researcher in his program.

Teachers College, founded in 1887 by the philanthropist Grace Hoadley Dodge and philosopher Nicholas Murray Butler, is the oldest and largest graduate school of education in the U.S. and has been home to many of the distinguishing figures in American education, including John Dewey, James Earl Russell, Edward Lee Thorndike, Isabel Maitland Steward, Morton Deutsch, Edmund Gordon and Maxine Greene. Teachers College, enrolling about 5,400 students, has ten departments that comprise more than 60 major academic programs. Roughly 30 percent of students are concentrated in teacher education programs. Over 15 percent of student body is composed of international students from 80 different countries and the nearly 85 percent of the students come from all 50 states.<sup>\*2</sup> To celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012, Teachers College has engaged *The Narrative Trust on Oral History* consisting of videotaped interviews with major figures in history over the past several decades.

Dr. John P. Allegrante, a senior professor of health education and deputy provost at Teachers College, administers the Teachers College Fulbright Program. Dr. Allegrante was a Fulbright Specialist in Public/Global Health from 2005 to 2010 and a Fulbright U.S. Scholar at Reykjavik, Iceland, in 2007. He is the Teachers College Fulbright Program Advisor and Campus Representative and a Fulbright Ambassador. Under Dr. Allegrante's dynamic leadership, the Teachers College Fulbright Program has been taking an important role in the U.S. and has not only actively offered opportunities for overseas students, scholars, and professionals to study, teach, lecture, and undertake advanced research at Columbia University, but also has sent their students and faculty to foreign countries to engage in similar activities.

## 2.2 Courses Audited

Since my primary research concern was for curriculum development of American Sign Language as a foreign language for Japanese hearing students learning English, I took the following courses at Teachers College, courtesy of Professor Russell Rosen and Ms. Bianca Aabel.

【Autumn Term 2011】 (September 7 – December 22)

- American Sign Language I
- Psychosociological Aspects of Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Methods and Materials in Teaching ASL and Deaf Community and Culture
- Assessment in ASL and Deaf Community and Culture

【Spring Term 2012】 (January 18 – May 8)

- American Sign Language II
- Psychosociological Aspects of Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Deaf and ASL Arts and Literature

## 2.3 Visits to Schools

- The American Sign Language & English Secondary School (School Number 47), 225 East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY 10010, guided by Mr. Anthony Adamo (11/21/2011)
- The Studio School, 117 West 95<sup>th</sup> Street New York, NY 10025, guided by Head of School Janet C. Rotter and Head of Publication Nadra Holmes (2/22/2012, 3/2/2012, 3/12/2012, 4/5/2012, 5/19/2012)
- Lexington School for the Deaf, 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue 75<sup>th</sup> Street Jackson Height, NY 11370, guided by Principal and Superintendent Regina Carroll, Ph.D. (4/2/2012)
- Boston University School of Education, 621 Commonwealth Avenue Boston, MA 02215, guided by Professor Bruce Bucci, Coordinator of the Programs in



Deaf Studies (4/10/2012)

- **Gallaudet University**, 800 Florida Avenue, NE Washington DC 20002, guided by Mr. Patrick J. Baker of the Department of Public Relations (4/19/2012)
- **Bank Street School for Children**, 610 West 112<sup>th</sup> Street New York, NY 10025, guided by Ms. Ronnie Sampson, Upper School Coordinator Mr. Stanlee Brimberg, and Dean of the Division of Children's Programs, Mr. Alexis Wright (4/24/2012, 5/8/2012)
- **St. Joseph's School for the Deaf**, 1000 Hutchinson River Parkway, Bronx, NY 10465, guided by Lower School Supervisor, Ms. Diane Woods, Technology & Media Coordinator, Ms. Adrienne Grant, and Ms. Christine Needham. Observed classes conducted by Dr. Kristin A. Di Perri (4/27/2012)
- **American School for the Deaf**, 139 North Main Street West Hartford, CT 06107, guided by Executive Director, Mr. Edward F. Peltier (5/3/2012)
- **The Learning Center for the Deaf**, 848 Central Street Framingham, MA 01701, guided by Director of ASL Instruction, Mr. Patrick J. Costello (5/7/2012)

## **2.4 Attendance to Conferences and Symposiums**

- **Columbia University Department of Psychiatry and New York State Psychiatric Institute Grand Rounds** (9/9/2011)
- **The Columbia University Weatherhead East Asian Institute Annual Conference**, Crisis and Response: The Tohoku Disaster and What It Means for Japan's Future. (9/20/2011)
- **The Columbia University Consortium for Japan Relief Symposium**, Dealing with Disaster: *Caring for Japan Post 3-11* (10/5/2011)
- **The Columbia University Center for Palestine Studies Symposium**, *America and Israel-Palestine: War and Peace*, by Dr. Noam Chomsky (10/17/2011)
- **Inaugural Celebration of Teachers College Department of Education Policy and Social Analysis Seminar**, *The Future of Education Policy: The 2012 Elec-*

*tion and Beyond*, by Dr. Christopher T. Cross, Dr. Jack Jennings and others. (2/8/2012)

- **Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference**, *2012 Year of Decision: The UN in American Foreign Policy* at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, featured by Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, Congresswoman Nita Lowey and others. (2/10/2012)
- **Special Fulbright Scholar Briefing**, Counterterrorism and Homeland Security at the Council on Foreign Relations' headquarters in Manhattan, by Dr. Richard Falkenrath (2/22/2012)
- **2012 IIE Best Practices Conference**, Fulbright Faculty Roundtable Discussion on Engaging Faculty in Internationalization, organized by the Institute of International Education (3/8/2012)
- **International Assessment Conference**, Educational Assessment, Accountability, and Equity: Conversation on Validity around the World, sponsored by Teachers College and Educational Testing Service (3/28, 3/29/2012)
- **Columbia University Consortium for Japan Relief Symposium**, *One Year Later: The State of Mental Health in Tohoku, Japan*, hosted by Consortium for Japan Relief (4/4/2012)
- *Educational Justice in South Asia and the Diaspora* at Teachers College, hosted by the Development in South Asia (4/6/2012)

## **2.5 Attendance to Seminars and Lectures**

- **The Columbia University Seminar on Innovation in Education**, *Socratic Conversation*, moderated by Professor Ronald Gross. (9/8/2011, 9/22/2011, 10/6/2011, 10/27/2011, 11/17/2011, 12/8/2011, 2/2/2012, 2/16/2012, 3/8/2012, 3/22/2012)
- **Global Classroom Training** by One To World (9/17/2011)
- **The Columbia University Seminar**, *The Pedagogy of Confidence*, by Professor Yvette Jackson (10/3/2011)
- **Columbia University's Scholarly Communication Program Seminar**, *Harness-*

- ing the Semantic Web for Scholarship, by Dr. Benno Blumenthal and others of the Digital Humanities Center (11/2/2011)
- **The Columbia University Seminar on Ethics, Moral Education, and Society**, *Can Virtue Be Taught?: Character Education Isn't Enough*, by Dr. Howard Radest (11/14/2011)
  - **The Columbia University Seminar on Ethics, Moral Education, and Society**, *Pushback Pedagogy and the Role of Philosophy in Education*, by Dr. Robbie McClintock (12/5/2011)
  - **The Columbia University Seminar on Ethics, Moral Education, and Society**, *Kohlberg's Baby All Grown Up and Thriving: The Just Community School in Scarsdale After 30 Plus Years*, by Professor Howard Rodstein and others (1/23/2012)
  - **The Columbia University Center for Digital Research and Scholarship Seminar**, *Virtual Reality, Vism, and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: Is there Hope for the Technically Challenged?*, by Dr. Lisa Synder of UCLA (1/30/2012)
  - **The Weatherhead East Asian Institute Seminar**, *The Idea of Political Reform in Today's China*, by Dr. Zhang Boshu (2/13/2012)
  - **The Department of International & Transcultural Studies Seminar**, *Comparative Perspectives on Education, Identity and Peace*, by Hebrew University Professor Zvi Bekerman (2/14/2012)
  - **The Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture Seminar**, *Social Media and Political Participation Before and After the Tohoku Earthquake*, by Kyodo News, Asahi Shinbun and others (2/24/2012)
  - **The Columbia University Scholarly Communication Program Seminar**, *Protests, Petitions and Publishing: Widening Access to Research in 2012*, by Dr. Gail Drakes, Dr. Oona Schmid and others (2/28/2012)
  - **The Columbia University Seminar**, *Willpower: Our Greatest Human Strength? What Role in Education?*, by Dr. John Tierney (3/5/2012)

- **NGO Health Committee Seminar**, *Health Workforce For Women*, organized by the NGO Committee on UNICEF (3/6/2012)
- **Fostering Conversation Between Faculty and Students**, at the City College of New York, organized by the Chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture (3/23/2012)
- **Masterpiece Theatre Lecture Series**, *Izumo No Okuni: The Woman Who Founded Kabuki*, at Ana Tzarev Gallery by Ms. Hellen E. Moss (3/27/2012)
- **Columbia University Seminar**, *Pax Ethnica: Where and How Diversity Succeeds*, lectured by Dr. Karl E. Meyer and Dr. Shareen Blair Brysac (4/2/2012)
- **Public Lecture and Stargazing** at Pupin Hall and Rutherford Observatory, organized by the Astronomy Department of Columbia University (4/13/2012)

## 2.6 My Presentations

- **The First ASL Program in Japan** at Columbia University (11/8/2011)
- **The Fulbright Experience: Reflections from TC Faculty and Students: Stories of Creativity – Identity, Ideals, and Innovation** at Columbia University (11/16/2011)
- The City College of New York School of Education Symposium, **Learning From Japanese Schools**, presented with Dr. James Shields and Dr. Steven Chemsak (2/28/2012)
- **The Fulbright Research Project and My Dream**, presented to middle school students from the Bronx at Columbia University, as a part of Global Careers and Education Program led by One To World (3/16/2012)
- **Townsend Harris and Japan**, at the City College of New York in Dr. Catherine Franklin's class (3/20/2012)

## 2.7 As a Returning Fulbrighter

As of this writing, three months have passed since I came back to Japan from the U.S. During these three months, I have accomplished the fol-

lowing work that was catalyzed by my stay in New York City as well as at Teachers College.

- (1) Made a visit to Shimoda in Izu Peninsula to explore more about Townsend Harris (1804-1878), the first U.S. ambassador to Japan, and the founder of the City College of New York, in order to build an academic course for my students aiming to raise their interest in the beginning of the relationship between Japan and the U.S.
- (2) Made a visit to Morioka in Iwate Prefecture to explore more about Dr. Inazo Nitobe, the author of *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*, and an Under-Secretary General of the League of Nations, and later chairman of the Japan Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, in order to build an academic course for my students focusing on global leadership. It was fruitful to take a look at a historic letter, written by Dr. Nitobe in 1911 and sent to Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, then president of Columbia University, at the Morioka Memorial Museum of Great Predecessors.
- (3) Made a proposal to Mr. Takao Kuramochi, 2012 Chair, Japan-United States Educational Commission, and Director General for International Affairs at the Ministry of Education, in order to raise the Japanese government's awareness to urgent education reform in Japanese elementary schools.
- (4) Set up a nationwide presentation in November to share my continuing research and teaching resulting from my activities as a Fulbrighter with others. The title of my presentation will be *American Sign Language Is Beautiful: From a Caterpillar into a Butterfly*.
- (5) Setting up an overseas study program (in progress) in cooperation with Teachers College, Columbia University and the City College of New York aiming to provide our Japanese students with an internship experience at elementary schools as well as English study in New York City.
- (6) Made a proposal to Fulbright Japan to dispatch Japanese elementary school teachers to the Bank Street School for Children and the Studio School in New

York City through the Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange Program for Education for Sustainable Development. This program brings together innovative K-12 teachers in Japan and the U.S. to deepen mutual understanding of each other's educational system and culture through reciprocal two-week study visits of the U.S. and Japan.

(7) Encouraging my students as well as colleagues to go abroad and see the world, inspiring them to apply for the Fulbright Program.

### **3. U.S. Model Schools for Japanese Education Reform**

In this chapter, let me draw your attention to two schools in New York City with my strong belief that these two schools have remarkable features that Japan should adopt in order to create a better elementary school environment for the nurturing of global human resources which Japan needs to develop.

#### **3.1 The Bank Street School for Children**

It is eight o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday in April. Children come to school and sit down on the sofa they like in the entrance hall which lets the sunshine in through the glass ceiling. They do not directly go to their classrooms. Some are practicing dancing, others are preparing for their presentations. A father is reading a book to his son. A mother is listening to her daughter's story. A school coordinator is speaking to some of the children and parents in the entrance hall asking how they are and if they need any help with anything. At eight thirty, the bell rings and the children scatter to their classrooms. This is the beginning of a typical day at the Bank Street School for Children.

Let me introduce the Bank Street School for Children\*<sup>3</sup> (hereafter the School for Children) in Manhattan which is a leader in progressive education in the U.S. The School for Children, with an enrollment of about 430 students between the ages of three and fourteen, has its origin in the progressive

movement of the early twentieth century. The School for Children was established in 1916 by visionary educator Lucy Sprague Mitchell. At that time, rote memorization practices were prevalent in schools. Mitchell, who was opposed to such practices, and who was influenced by the ideas of educational theorist John Dewey, established classrooms in which children were encouraged to venture out and actively inquire about the world around them. The spirit of the founder continues now at the three school levels of the School for Children.

Let me briefly describe the three school levels. The Lower School, consisting of Nursery, Prekindergarten, and Kindergarten, is for children aged 3 to 6. Since children in this developmental level are not yet ready for abstract ideas, their learning is based on their daily experiences focusing on the concrete visible world around them. Therefore, play, using sensorial materials such as blocks, paint, clay, wood, and water, is the means through which the Lower School children think and create meaning.

The Middle School, consisting of first to fourth Grades, is for children aged 6 to 10. The most remarkable characteristic in the Middle School is its social studies curricula which gradually move from “here and now” in first Grade to “far away” in fourth Grade through “long ago” in second and third Grades. These curricula aim that children begin to make powerful connections between historical and distant occurrences and the situations they experience in their daily lives.

The Upper School is for students aged ten through fourteen. Each Upper School classroom is team-taught by one teacher for the humanities and one for math and science. Classes are often taught in small groups. Upper School students are able to respect and consider lifestyles, values, and ideals that are different from theirs. Information and knowledge is shared and further reinforced through debates, extended role plays, art and craft

projects, fieldtrips, and related publishing work.

While observing classes in the spring of 2012, I witnessed how progressive education at the School for Children developed thoughtful and productive children by connecting teaching and learning meaningfully to the outside world. Among these, play activities using clay and wooden blocks for the Lower School children, a mock Congress and a research project about the life of Native Americans for the Middle School children were worthy to note.

For example, the Lower School children, through play, were learning about themselves, each other, and their environment. Classrooms in the Lower School were set up to invite play. Teachers firmly believed that children at play were meaningfully involved in aspects of social and cognitive development. In the mock Congress class for the Middle School children, they were preparing for a trip to Washington D.C. to interview congressmen and senators, learning appropriate strategies to persuade them by providing convincing data and statistics. What was impressive was that children were able to accept constructive criticism from others and take it in to help improve their way of thinking. Instead of simply memorizing facts and statistics, it was clear that they were deeply involved in many modes of learning experiences.

Particular attention should also be drawn to art as a vital part of the curriculum at the School for Children. I noticed that through art, children recreated and integrated curriculum experiences, including social studies, language arts, science, and math concepts. One of the children proudly told me about the work they were engaged in by explaining about pictures, charts, schedules and graphs on their walls and bulletin boards.

As part of Bank Street College of Education, the Bank Street School for Children is continually refining and applying the highest standards in the field of progressive education. I enjoyed experiencing the diversity, energy,



and enthusiasm that made up the School for Children learning community.

### 3.2 The Studio School

In order to create a better elementary school, attention should also be drawn to emotional education as well as progressive education. In this respect, the Studio School\*<sup>4</sup> in Manhattan is a good model. The Studio School, founded in 1971 in the heart of Manhattan's Greenwich Village by Robert Welber, a psychotherapist, and his wife, Dr. Dolores Welber, a psychoanalyst, derives its name from the image of an artist working in his or her studio. The Studio School, with an enrollment of about 120 students aged 2 to 14, offers four educational programs, Toddler, Early Childhood, Elementary School, and Middle School.

When it comes to the history of the Studio School, it is important to know about a woman named Virginia O'Hanlon, who wrote a famous letter in 1897 at the age of 8 to *The New York Sun* about the existence of Santa Claus. "I am 8 years old," Virginia wrote, "Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so.' Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?" Virginia's question inspired Francis Pharcellus Church, an editor at *The Sun*, to respond with one of the most famous editorials ever printed in U.S. history, known by a line he wrote, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

In response to Virginia, Mr. Church wrote, "*He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no VIRGINIAS. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the*

*world would be extinguished...Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see... No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."*

The Studio School incorporates buildings that include 115 West 95th Street, where Virginia and her family lived when she wrote her letter to *The New York Sun* in 1897. Virginia earned a Master's degree in Education from Columbia University in 1912 and a doctorate from Fordham University later. In 1912, she began her career as a teacher in New York City, and eventually became a school principal in 1935. Without Mr. Church's reply, Virginia may not have become a teacher. She devoted herself to helping children of misfortune until she passed away at the age of 81.

Ms. Janet C. Rotter (2009), head of the Studio School, states that Virginia's question and Mr. Church's answer speak to what is essential in education, the importance of people asking questions and answering them with both their hearts and minds. This is what I want to stress about education reform in Japanese elementary schools in terms of the relationship between a teacher and student.

I witnessed Virginia's legacy continued at the Studio School reflecting the spirit of Virginia and Mr. Church faithfully and respectfully. Through several class observations in the spring of 2012, I came to realize that the Studio School's educational philosophy was to educate the hearts and minds of children. I noticed that the teachers integrated the philosophy of their education with the school curriculum, guiding students' intellectual development and emotional self-awareness.

The Studio School's curriculum is designed for students to explore and

master how to learn and how to think through its integrative approach to the disciplines of science and social studies. Students are inspired to make insightful and original connections between disciplines through integrative concepts.

There are specially designed classes to provide daily opportunities for students to broaden and deepen their interests and learning, while encouraging their passions and supporting their maturational stages. Among these classes, let me draw your attention to the following classes: *Kitchen Science*, *Thinking and Writing*, and *Read To Mika*.

*Kitchen Science* is an innovative class that has been a part of the Studio School since its founding in 1971. A rotating team of children of all ages work with a teacher and chefs each day to prepare and serve lunch. The experience of preparing, setting up, and serving lunch, as well as cleaning up afterward, is a life lesson and an important service to the school community.

*Thinking and Writing*, which I strongly recommend Japanese elementary schools to adopt, begins in the Elementary Program. The teacher uses a wide variety of materials from philosophical questions to newspaper editorials and magazine articles to elicit student response, and stimulate discussion and debate. After a first draft for discussion, time is set aside for one-on-one meetings with each student so that the teacher can probe his/her ideas and opinions more deeply by asking questions and clarifying statements. In the process, the student begins to notice how to express him or herself in an active, strong voice by experimenting with vocabulary, style, point of view, etc. *Thinking and Writing* class evolves into a seminar where students are challenged with assignments to nourish their growing minds.

*Read To Mika* is a reading course, which is lacking in Japanese elementary schools, but seems necessary to create a healing environment. It is more than a reading class. In this class, children wishing to read to Mika, an

attentive dog, come one at a time to meet with her and her owner. The benefits of this class are more than fluency and confidence in reading; they help develop a deeper sense of emotional security in oneself and it is when the teacher and dog are connected with the child in the moment that the creative and imaginative side of that child emerges. Mika facilitates this connection because she is completely nonjudgmental.

#### **4. Proposal for Education Reform in Japan**

In this chapter, I will refer to why I am proposing urgent education reform at the elementary school level in Japan.

##### **4.1 Factors Necessary for Global Human Resources**

Over the past twenty years, China and other emerging Asian countries have achieved dramatic economic growth, while Japan has continued to record low growth over the long term called “Two Lost Decades.” Japan’s GDP ranking fell from 10<sup>th</sup> in the world in 1990 to 25<sup>th</sup> in 2011. According to the latest World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report 2012-13, Japan fell to 10<sup>th</sup>, down one place from the previous year, in global competitiveness.

It is clear that Japan’s economic status is steadily declining and Japan’s global presence will inevitably diminish if the Japanese government does not take any decisive action to implement a growth strategy. In response to such social needs of the times, “the nurturing of globally competitive human resources” has become a main concern for the Japanese government and the Japanese government established the Council on the Promotion of Human Resources for Globalization Development in May 2011, chaired by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano, with the aim of cultivating “global human resources” who would drive Japan toward future advancement.

Let's examine the factors of "global human resources" proposed by the Japanese government. An interim report from the Council above includes the following three factors: 1) Linguistic and communication skills, 2) Self-direction and positiveness, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission, and 3) Understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as a Japanese. Are these factors sufficient enough to achieve economic and social advancement? Are these factors enough for the younger Japanese generation who will be inevitably required to get involved in bilateral and multilateral negotiations with various people of diverse cultures from different countries skillfully and strategically?

Among the three factors above, linguistic and communication skills particularly have a great effect on negotiations with others. I want to include three elements, *grammar*, *logic*, and *rhetoric*, chosen from the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum, known to ancient Greece and Rome and to Western Europe of medieval times, in communication skills. Grammar is necessary to write correctly and speak skillfully. Great value should be placed on logic to carry on a convincing conversation or argue in a wholly rational manner with carefully organized flow of words. By using rhetoric, a desired impression is made on a listener or a reader.

Then, when is the most appropriate time for "global human resources" to learn grammar, logic, and rhetoric? Teachers at the university level in Japan have been criticized for failing to teach communication skills as well as cultivate students' ability to operate globally. As a university teacher, however, I want to make it clear that it is not at the university level but rather at the elementary school level that any learning necessary for acquiring communication skills should start. It is elementary school education that forms a basic foundation for "global human resources" for the 21st century, and most importantly, the language used should be our

first language, that is, the Japanese language.

## 4.2 Failure in the Past Japanese Education Reform

Then, who is largely responsible for developing “global human resources” and what is the most influential key to success in developing “global human resources”? The answer is teachers, and the quality and training of teachers. Are Japanese school teachers, especially elementary school teachers, trained well enough to have the ability to elicit student response by asking questions? Are they trained well enough to facilitate student’s affective, as well as cognitive, growth by connecting teaching and learning meaningfully to the outside world?

The principal concern of Japanese education reform since 1984 was human resources. It seems to me, however, that the reform has not been successful in taking the teacher into account as an agent of change. In 1984 the Ad Hoc Council on Education (Rinji Kyoiku Shingikai or simply Rinkyoshin in Japanese) was set up by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in response to rising concerns about the quality of education in Japan. Consequently, relaxed education and individual differences became the features of the Japanese Ministry of Education’s policy afterward. It is possible to point out that the Ad Hoc Council on Education was largely responsible for laying out a new direction about education reform that would structure the debate throughout much of the 1990s.

For example, in 1996 the Central Council for Education (Chuo Kyoiku Shingikai or simply Chukyoshin in Japanese) released a series of four reports, entitled *Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and as a result, “zest for living” (ikiru chikara) and “relaxed education” (yutori kyoiku) became buzzwords that quickly entered the public discourse on education in Japan.

When these abstract ideals were translated into concrete policies, the

Japanese Ministry of Education sought to reduce the total curriculum by as much as 30%, and the Course of Studies for Elementary Schools revised in 1998 introduced a new field named “The Period for Integrated Studies”, or the so-called Sogo Gakushu. It was a new approach brought into elementary school education, and teachers were challenged to design the contents of curriculum by themselves without being provided with appropriate teacher training programs.

### **4.3 Educational Value in Socratic Teaching**

Since the establishment of the Ad Hoc Council of Education in 1984, it should be pointed out that Japan has failed to create effective teacher training programs. Especially since 1998, Japan has failed to develop elementary school teachers who can create a progressive education environment with Socratic minds, like the teachers I encountered at the Bank Street School for Children and the Studio School, in terms of the nurturing of globally competitive human resources.

Let me take the Studio School teachers as an example. In a preparation class for a trip to White Plains, the Studio School teachers were attuned to the growth and development of their children. With great care and patience, they concentrated on each child’s stage of development. They served as facilitators in the classroom, creating a challenging environment that reflected the delicate balance between instruction and exploration. It actively required both teachers and children to listen and to ask questions.

In this setting, the Studio School teachers used the Socratic Method, encouraging children to expand and deepen their reasoning abilities, and to honor their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the subjects they were studying. This taught them how to present persuasive, convincing arguments (both written and oral), and to welcome feedback from their teachers and

classmates.

In another occasion when children were reflecting what happened in their lives in the previous week, the Studio School head, Ms. Rotter, asked a series of questions, making the children who answered the questions understand not only the point the teacher was trying to make but also that they didn't know as much as they thought they did. This is a powerful teaching method or a pedagogical technique because it actively engages the learner and forces critical thinking, which is exactly what I think is needed for a skilled Japanese elementary school teacher. The method is also dramatic and entertaining, and it triggers lively classroom discussion.

Whenever I visited the Studio School to observe classes and school events, I often noticed that the Studio School teachers adopted similar questions in Richard (1993), for instance, 1) Questions of Clarification (ex. "What do you mean by ---?"), 2) Questions that Probe Assumptions (ex. "What are you assuming?"), 3) Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence (ex. "Why do you think that is true?"), 4) Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives (ex. "What are you implying by that?"), 5) Questions that Prove Implications and Consequences (ex. "Why is this issue important?"), and 6) Questions about the Question, (ex. "Why do you think I asked this question?").

#### **4.4 Urgent Need for Education Reform**

The number of Japanese students studying in U.S. colleges and universities slipped from a high in 1997 of over 47,000 to slightly less than 25,000 in 2010. Pointing out this phenomenon, Dr. David H. Satterwhite (2010), Executive Director of the Japan-U.S. Educational Commission, is concerned about the long-range implications for Japan's international competitiveness. It has become an urgent issue for Japan to cultivate the younger generation, especially today's younger generation with "inwardly looking attitudes"



who neither wish to study nor to work overseas.

As a governmental initiative, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry<sup>\*5</sup> (METI) announced in May 2012 that it would start invitation of applicants for interns to take part in the “Dispatch of Interns through the Internship for METI Global Human Resources Development.” Through this project, young working Japanese adults and students will be dispatched as interns to governments, government organizations, and private companies in developing countries. METI expects to develop Japan’s global human resources who will play an active role in expanding markets in rising countries.

Furthermore, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda laid a special stress on the need for fundamental education reform in Japan at the fifth meeting of the Council on National Strategy and Policy held in June 2012. The Prime Minister proclaimed that the Japanese government would take initiatives to the offering of opportunities to study abroad to 110,000 students, which accounts for about 10% of the younger generations, by 2020.

Sending our Japanese students overseas may be one possible way of developing global human resources, but it is not necessarily enough. Before sending Japanese students overseas, we must teach them how to communicate strategically with people in other countries to work globally. If the Japanese government truly wants to develop “global human resources”, then we must propose a bolder approach for education reform in Japan.

As of August 2012, there are 21,460 elementary schools in Japan. Out of these, only 220 (1.03%) are private schools.<sup>\*6</sup> Japanese education reform has not been bold enough to substantially improve public education. We must be bold enough to break out of the traditional image of the Japanese teacher and school. Global human resources development will never be possible without improving the quality of elementary school teachers and

their school environment. What Japan needs now is a progressive elementary school environment and skilled elementary school teachers, just like what I experienced and witnessed at the Bank Street School for Children and the Studio School. Now is the time for Japan to treat elementary school teachers as true professionals.

## 5. Conclusion

While studying in New York City as a Fulbrighter, I strongly felt that there was an urgent need for Japan to create a new elementary school with a progressive education environment with skilled teachers. At the Bank Street School for Children and the Studio School, I was not guided to specific lessons or activities prepared for visitors to observe, but instead I witnessed progressive education and emotional education in action everywhere inside the school by observing their teaching methods, materials, room arrangements, and dialogue among teachers and children. Being aware of children's intrinsic desire to know about the world, teachers at these two schools used a flexible and developmentally structured curriculum that was in tune with each student's readiness to move forward to the next level.

I want to propose that the Japanese Ministry of Education should reflect the philosophy and spirit of these two schools in establishing a new type of elementary school in Japan from now on. These two schools will also undoubtedly provide significant incentives for Japanese elementary school teachers to become leaders in English language classes which were officially implemented in 2011 by the Japanese Ministry of Education as a compulsory class for all 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

On August 6, 2012, NASA's Mars rover *Curiosity* completed its nine-month journey from Earth and landed successfully on the surface of Mars. Under the sound of congratulatory cheers and high-fives, scientists and

staff members at the mission control center hugged each other with their eyes full of tears as one of them announced, “Touchdown confirmed. We are safe on the surface of Mars!” They seemed to me as if they were five-year-old boys and girls full of curiosity.

Since I saw the huge fiber optic display, *Believe*, illuminating brilliantly on the outside wall of Macy’s in Manhattan last November, I have been considering the power of believing in belief. Let’s have our children not only believe in Santa, but also believe in belief. Let’s have our children be curious and let them have the courage to question. And, most importantly, let’s develop teachers who can proudly declare, “Yes, there is a Santa Claus,” to the children full of curiosity. It is a teacher’s role to teach that even a short letter can make a difference and change the world.

Now I have a dream. I want to establish an elementary school in Japan for the children who lost their school buildings as well as their parents and loved ones in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. What I am planning is not a traditional Japanese school, but a new type of progressive school with children full of curiosity that Japan has never seen before. We experienced a once-in-a-thousand-year natural disaster. I am not talking about a school to be appreciated by people living one thousand years from now. Instead, this is a school in which we can proudly declare twenty years from now that we have truly developed “global human resources” who can send their message all over the world with their own voices about what happened in their hometown on March 11, 2011, how they recovered from the disaster with their resilience and fortitude, and what difference they made to change the world. My journey toward one more miracle has just started.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Nagoya University of Foreign

Studies, Teachers College at Columbia University in the City of New York, and the Japan-United States Educational Commission for making my time in the U.S. as a Fulbrighter a reality. Among others, I am deeply grateful to Dr. John P. Allegrante and Dr. Russell S. Rosen for their encouragement to my research work and life in New York City. Appreciation is also extended to Dr. Nancy Stern, Dr. Catherine Franklin, and Dr. James J. Shields for their invitation to their lectures and symposiums at the City College of New York. Special thanks go to Ms. Nadra Holmes of then The Studio School Head of Publications for enriching my research experience in New York City.

## References

\*1 <http://www.fulbright.jp/>

\*2 <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/>

\*3 <http://www.bnkst.edu/school-children/>

\*4 <http://www.studioschoolnyc.org/>

\*5 <http://www.meti.go.jp/english/>

\*6 <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/>

Paul, Richard. (1993). *Critical Thinking: How to Prepare Students for a Rapidly Changing World*. Foundation for Critical Thinking.

Rotter, Janet C. (2009). “Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus.”, *The Huffington Post*, dated December 24, 2009.

Satterwhite, David H. (2010). “Taro doesn’t study here anymore.”, *The Daily Yomiuri*, dated January 21, 2010.

## About the author

Toshikazu Kikuchi, Ph.D. is a professor of English in the Department of English Language Teaching of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies in Japan. He has ten years experience teaching at metropolitan high schools in Tokyo, fourteen years at a national college of technology, three years at the University of Tokyo, and eight years at the current university. He studied at the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Reading in England in 1992 and the Boston University School of Education in the U.S. from 1999 to 2000. He also studied at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City as a Fulbright visiting scholar from 2011 to 2012.